

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----087505 062003Z /43

P R 061952Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4573
SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USNATO
USNMR SHAPE
CINC USAREUR HEIDELBERG
CINC USAFE RAMSTEIN
CINC EUR VAIHINGEN

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 00304

EXDIS

MILITARY HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, MPOL, GW, US
SUBJECT: GEORGE LEBER AT BAY

REFS: (A) BONN 20874 (B) BONN 20659

1.. FOLLOWING IS OUR CURRENT ESTIMATE OF FRG DEFENSE
MINISTER LEBER'S FUTURE AND OF THE IMPACT OF HIS
POSSIBLE DEPARTURE ON FRG DEFENSE POLICY.

2. DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON JUST ENDED, PRESS
SPECULATION ON FRG DEFENSE MINISTER LEBER'S FUTURE
ALL BUT DRIED UP AND THE LUTZE SPY STORY QUIETLY MOVED
OFF THE FRONT PAGES.

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3. HOWEVER, ON JANUARY 10TH THE
BUNDESTAG INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE WILL BEGIN HEARINGS
ON THE SPY CASE. EVEN THOUGH OTHER SUBJECTS WILL BE
COMPETING FOR ATTENTION AT THAT TIME, WE EXPECT THE
HEARINGS TO BE BRUTAL AND TO ATTRACT CONSIDERABLE
ATTENTION. THEY WILL BE CHAIRED BY MANFRED WOERNER,

THE CDU DEFENSE SPECIALIST. LEBER HIMSELF, BY STATING THAT HE KNEW LITTLE ABOUT THE CASE UNTIL THE PRESS STORIES TWO WEEKS AGO, HAS PROVIDED HIS OPPONENTS WITH AMMUNITION TO THE EFFECT THAT HE IS LOSING CONTROL OF THE MINISTRY.

4. WE BELIEVE LEBER WILL SURVIVE THE JANUARY BATTLE. HE GENERATES MUCH MORE SYMPATHY THAN THE ARROGANT WOERNER AND HE WILL WIN SUPPORT EVEN FROM THOSE MEMBERS OF HIS PARTY WHO DO NOT NORMALLY BACK HIM. MOREOVER, SCHMIDT KNOWS ALL TOO WELL THAT HE COULD NOT ABANDON LEBER AT THIS JUNCTURE WITHOUT OFFENDING THOSE MODERATE AND AND CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS IN THE SPD WHO REGARD LEBER AS THEIR MAN.

5. HOWEVER, THE LUTZE CASE IS ONLY ONE MORE OF THE SERIES OF "AFFAIRS" THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTRY HAS SPAWNED OVER THE LAST YEAR OF LEBER'S STEWARDSHIP. SUCH OTHER "AFFAIRS" AS THOSE INVOLVING RUDEL, KRUPINSKI, THE HAMBURG MILITARY ACADEMY, AND THE RECENT CHARGES OF PRO-NAZI INCIDENTS AT THE MUNICH MILITARY SCHOOL, HAVE SAPPED LEBER'S STANDING. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT NOBODY PERSONALLY BLAMES LEBER FOR THOSE INCIDENTS. HOWEVER, THEY HAPPENED ON HIS WATCH.

6. THEREFORE, ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE THAT SCHMIDT HAS
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NOT LOST HIS OWN CONFIDENCE IN LEBER, WE MUST RECKON WITH THE POSSIBILITY THAT LEBER MAY LEAVE THE CABINET AS PART OF A RESHUFFLE THAT SCHMIDT HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED AS UPCOMING IN THE FIRST HALF OF NEXT YEAR.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----087671 062029Z /41

P R 061952Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4574
SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USNATO
USNMR SHAPE
CINC USAREUR HEIDELBERG
CINC USAF RAMSTEIN
CINC EUR VAIHINGEN

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EXDIS

AT LEAST ONE PRESENT CABINET MINISTER--HOUSING MINISTER KARL RAVENS--NEEDS TO LEAVE THE CABINET IN THE SPRING OF 1978 TO HEAD THE SPD CAMPAIGN FOR THE JUNE ELECTIONS IN LOWER SAXONY. OTHER LESS IMPORTANT CABINET MINISTERS COULD ALSO BE SHUFFLED. AS PART OF SUCH A SHIFT, LEBER COULD LEAVE WITH DIGNITY AND HONOR AND WITH HIS HEAD HELD HIGH, HAVING SERVED ELEVEN YEARS CONTINUOUSLY IN VARIOUS MINISTERIAL POSITIONS. SCHMIDT COULD THEN PRESENT A NEW CABINET AS A SIGN OF RENEWED GOVERNMENT VIGOR AS THE SPD HEADS INTO THIS YEAR'S STATE ELECTIONS.

7. THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION IN THE PRESS AND POLITICAL CIRCLES ABOUT A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR. WE HAVE INDICATIONS THAT THE FRONT RUNNER AT THIS POINT IS FINANCE MINISTER APEL. OTHER NAMES THAT HAVE BEEN MENTIONED ARE JUSTICE MINISTER FOGEL, BREMEN'S
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LORD MAYOR KOSCHNICK, FMOD PARLIAMENTARY STATE SECRETARY VON BUELOW, AND MINISTER OF TRANSPORT STATE SECRETARY (AND SCHMIDT CONFIDANT) RUHNAU. ONE PROBLEM IN FINDING A SUCCESSOR IS THAT SENIOR SPD FIGURES ARE NOT ANXIOUS TO ASSUME THE POSITION, WHICH SERVES AS A NATURAL LIGHTNING ROD FOR THE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY AND THE LEFT WING OF THE SPD, AND WHICH HAS NOT SO FAR (EXCEPT IN SCHMIDT'S CASE) SERVED AS A USEFUL STEPPING STONE TO OTHER OFFICE.

8. BECAUSE OF THE UNCERTAINTY AS TO WHO MIGHT SUCCEED LEBER, IF INDEED HE GOES, WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO ESTIMATE THE SUCCESSOR'S ATTITUDES. HOWEVER, THERE ARE CERTAIN REALITIES WHICH WILL PROBABLY MARK ANY SUCCESSOR: HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE YOUNGER;

UNLESS IT IS RUHNAU, HE WILL PROBABLY BE LESS INCLINED TO LOOK AUTOMATICALLY FOR TRANS-ATLANTIC SOLUTIONS TO DEFENSE ISSUES; HAVING LEARNED FROM LEBER'S EXPERIENCE, HE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY FOCUS MORE INTENTLY ON ADMINISTRATION OF THE FRG DEFENSE APPARATUS. HE WOULD ALSO, BECAUSE OF THE REALITIES OF THE GERMAN STRATEGIC POSITION, REMAIN FULLY COMMITTED TO A HIGH LEVEL OF GERMAN MILITARY READINESS AND TO A FULL GERMAN ROLE IN NATO.

9. WITH RESPECT TO PROGRAMS IN WHICH WE HAVE AN IMMEDIATE INTEREST, MOST SPECIFICALLY AWACS AND THE "COMMON" TANK PROGRAM, IT IS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT A SUCCESSOR'S ATTITUDE BECAUSE SO MUCH DEPENDS ON SURROUNDING CIRCUMSTANCES. WE WOULD EXPECT THAT NO SUCCESSOR WOULD HAVE LEBER'S PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO AWACS OR BE AS READY AS HE HAS BEEN TO TAKE ON THE SERVICES AND THE BUNDESTAG ON THESE ISSUES, ESPECIALLY
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DURING THE FIRST FEW MONTHS WHEN ANY NEW MINISTER WOULD FIRST NEED TO SETTLE INTO OFFICE. HOWEVER, IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE FUTURE GERMAN POSITION ON AWACS DEPENDS MORE ON THE OUTCOME OF THE TANK GUN COMPETITION THAN ON THE PERSONALITY AND ATTITUDES OF ANY PARTICULAR MINISTER. AS FOR THE TANK PROGRAM ITSELF, WE WOULD EXPECT THAT ANY MINISTER WOULD STILL FEEL COMMITTED TO THE CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF THE TURBINE ENGINE IF WE TAKE THE 120 MM GUN, BUT NONE WOULD TAKE THE TURBINE UNLESS WE BUY THE GUN.

10. WE WOULD ALSO EXPECT THAT ANY FUTURE MINISTER WOULD WANT TO ESTABLISH EARLY AND CLOSE CONTACTS WITH SENIOR U.S. DEFENSE OFFICIALS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 Jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, PERSONNEL MOVEMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 Jan 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BONN00304
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780011-0048
Format: TEL
From: BONN
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780193/aaaadanw.tel
Line Count: 209
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5e9c01e6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 BONN 20874, 78 BONN 20659
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 Aug 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3820115
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GEORGE LEBER AT BAY
TAGS: MILI, MPOL, GE, US, (LEBER, GEORGE)
To: STATE DOD
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5e9c01e6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014